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ABSTRACT

Information on children's activities in the home with other family members was collected in the 1991 National Household Education Survey. The premise of the survey was that readiness for school may be affected by experiences that children bring with them to the classroom. Data were collected by telephone from the parents and guardians of 13,892 children of 3 to 8 years between February and April of 1991. The overall response rate was 76.3 percent. Topics surveyed included reading, television viewing and related family rules, and the frequency of a variety of activities that take place in the home. Activities were chosen because of their close relationship to a child's preparation for learning in school. It was found that family members read to 35 percent of 3- to 8-year-olds on a daily basis, and only 7 percent of children of this age are never read to or are read to infrequently. Children not enrolled in school watch an average of 3.1 hours of television or videotapes each day. Those in nursery school watch 2.6 hours per day, and those in primary grades watch about 2.2 hours per day. More children have restrictions on the types of television shows they may watch (85 percent) than on the number of hours they may watch on weekdays (60 percent) and on the total number of television viewing hours (56 percent). (LB)

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Statistics in Brief **January 1992**

Home Activities of 3- to 8-year-olds

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Information on children's activities in the home with other family members was collected in the 1991 National Household Education Survey (NHES) conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. Data were collected by telephone from the parents and guardians of 13,892 children 3 to 8 years old between February and April of 1991.

Readiness for school may be affected by the wide range of experiences that children bring with them to the classroom. These experiences may also have affected the achievement levels of children already in school. This brief report,[1] one of several which NCES plans to release based on the early childhood component of the 1991 NHES, presents information on selected activities young children engage in with family members. The topics include reading, television viewing and related family rules, and the frequency of a variety of activities that take place in the home. These activities were chosen for study because of their close relationship to a child's preparation for learning in school.

Reading Activity

It is generally thought that reading to young children on a regular basis encourages their interest in reading and helps them develop the reading skills necessary to progress in school. Consequently, parents are encouraged to read to their children daily.

Family members[2] read to 35 percent of 3- to 8-year-old children on a daily basis (table 1). An additional 58 percent of young children are read to less frequently, but on a regular basis -- that is, several times per month or per week. Only about 7 percent of 3- to 8-year-olds are never read to or are read to infrequently (i.e., several times per year).

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Table 1.—Percentage of 3- to 8-year-old children who are read to, by frequency, and by child's school enrollment: 1991

Characteristic	Children (thousands)	Reading frequency					
		Never or several times per year		Several times per month or per week		Every day	
		percent	standard error	percent	standard error	percent	standard error
Total	22,294	7	.2	58	.6	35	.5
Child's school enrollment							
not enrolled	4,853	4	.4	54	1.1	42	.9
nursery school[1]	3,571	2	.3	51	1.4	47	1.3
kindergarten[2]	4,023	4	.4	56	1.0	40	1.0
first grade	3,993	5	.5	62	1.2	33	1.2
second grade	3,554	11	.6	67	1.1	22	1.1
third grade or higher	2,270	24	1.3	62	1.4	14	1.3
ungraded, no equivalent	29	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1]Includes children enrolled in nursery school, prekindergarten and Head Start.

[2]Includes children enrolled in kindergarten and in transitional grades between kindergarten and first grade, such as transitional kindergarten or prefirst grade.

—Unweighted number of cases is less than 30.

NOTES: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding. In the preprimary interview, parents were asked how often they or the child's other parent/guardian (if any) read to the child. In the elementary interview, parents were asked how often they and other family members read to the child.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), spring 1991.

Table 2.—Percentage of 3- to 8-year-old children who have been read to by family members in the past week, by frequency and by child's school enrollment: 1991

Characteristic	Children (thousands)	Read to child in the past week					
		Never		One or two times		Three or more times	
		percent	standard error	percent	standard error	percent	standard error
Total	22,294	12	.3	27	.5	61	.5
Child's school enrollment							
not enrolled	4,853	7	.6	24	1.0	69	1.0
nursery school[1]	3,571	5	.6	20	1.1	76	1.2
kindergarten[2]	4,023	5	.4	24	1.0	71	1.0
first grade	3,993	10	.7	30	1.0	60	1.1
second grade	3,554	20	1.0	36	1.2	44	1.2
third grade or higher	2,270	35	1.8	34	1.4	31	1.8
ungraded, no equivalent	29	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1]Includes children enrolled in nursery school, prekindergarten and Head Start.

[2]Includes children enrolled in kindergarten and in transitional grades between kindergarten and first grade, such as transitional kindergarten or prefirst grade.

—Unweighted number of cases is less than 30.

NOTE: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), spring 1991.

Families were more likely to read to children who are not yet enrolled in school (i.e., not enrolled in nursery school, kindergarten, or first grade) and to those who are enrolled in nursery school or kindergarten on a daily basis than children in primary grades.

Among children enrolled in primary grades (first grade or higher), daily reading activity with family members decreases with each year of schooling, from 33 percent among first graders to 14 percent among those in third grade or higher.[3] The decrease in daily reading is accompanied, at most levels, with an increase in the percent of children who are read to on a less frequent, but regular basis (several times per month or per week). Only among those in third grade does the percent of children who are never or rarely read to increase substantially (24 percent).

Reading Activity During the Previous Week

The parents of the children in the NHES sample were also asked whether they had read to their child during the week prior to survey. Their responses were consistent with the more general question on reading frequency cited above. About 61 percent of the children were read to by family members three or more times in the previous week (table 2). The data show that as children progress in school, the frequency of being read to by family members decreases. Approximately 71 percent of kindergarten children were read to three or more times during the previous week compared with 60 percent of first graders, 44 percent of second graders and 31 percent of those in third grade.

Television Viewing

Much attention has been given to the amount of television watched by children. Parents were asked to report the number of hours that their children watch television shows or videotapes each day.

In general, the average number of hours of television viewing each day decreases as the grade or year in school increases.[4] Children not enrolled in school watch an average of 3.1 hours of television or videotapes each day. Those in nursery school or kindergarten watch 2.6. and 2.5 hours, respectively. Children in primary grades watch from 2.2 to 2.3 hours daily (table 3).

Television-Related Rules

Parents who reported television and videotape viewing hours were asked about rules they establish in their households related to their children's viewing. A large majority of 3- to 8-year-olds live in households with rules on how early or late they may watch television(89 percent). In general, more children have restrictions on the types of television shows they may watch (85 percent) than on the number of hours they may watch on weekdays (60 percent) and on the total number of television viewing hours (56 percent).

A difference across grade levels is observed in the percent of children subject to rules on how early or late they may watch television. Rules on how early or late young children may watch television are less common for children who are not enrolled in school than for any other group of children. For example, 80 percent of children not enrolled in school are subject to this rule compared with 87 percent of children enrolled in nursery school.

Rules pertaining to the number of hours that children may watch are more common for children who are enrolled in school than children who are not. The percent of children in families with limitations on viewing hours on weekdays is only 47 percent of nonenrolled children, but increases to 55 percent of nursery school children and 61 percent of kindergartners. About two-thirds of children in each of the primary grades are members of families that have such rules.

Table 3.—Average hours of television viewing, and percent of 3- to 8-year-old children whose families have television-related rules, by child's school enrollment: 1991

Characteristic	Children (thousands)	Hours of TV daily[1]		Percent with television-related rules[2]							
				What shows he/she may watch		How early or late he/she may watch		Hours he/she may watch overall		Hours he/she may watch on weekdays	
		average	standard error	percent	standard error	percent	standard error	percent	standard error	percent	standard error
Total	22,294	2.5	.02	85	.5	89	.4	56	.6	60	.6
Child's school enrollment											
not enrolled	4,853	3.1	.05	82	.7	80	.8	50	1.2	47	1.2
nursery school[3]	3,571	2.6	.03	87	.8	87	.8	55	1.1	55	1.0
kindergarten[4]	4,023	2.5	.03	85	.8	90	.7	56	1.3	61	1.2
first grade	3,993	2.2	.03	86	.9	94	.6	59	1.2	66	1.2
second grade	3,554	2.2	.03	87	.9	94	.6	60	1.3	67	1.1
third grade or higher	2,270	2.3	.03	86	1.2	93	.8	61	1.5	68	1.5
ungraded, no equivalent	29	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1]Includes hours watching television shows and videotapes.

[2]Includes children whose parents reported viewing hours.

[3]Includes children enrolled in nursery school, prekindergarten, and Head Start.

[4]Includes children enrolled in kindergarten and in transitional grades between kindergarten and first grade, such as transitional kindergarten or prefirst grade.

—Unweighted number of cases is less than 30.

NOTE: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), spring 1991.

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Other Activities with Family Members

The range of experiences that children have outside of school and the types of experiences they bring to school are believed to have an influence on their ability to manage a variety of school experiences and develop interests in a wide range of subject matter areas. Consequently, many home experiences may serve developmental functions by broadening general knowledge, improving social skills, and developing physical coordination.

Parents were asked to identify a variety of developmental, educational, and recreational activities their children had participated in with family members during the week prior to the interview, and the frequency of each activity. The types of activities asked included: reading to the child (discussed above); working on arts and crafts projects; playing games or sports; and watching educational television.[5]

Slightly over one-fourth (28 percent) of the children worked on an arts and crafts project with family members three or more times during the week prior to the interview (figure 1). Children who are not yet enrolled in school (34 percent) and those who are enrolled in nursery school or kindergarten (31 percent and 35 percent, respectively) are more likely to have worked on arts and crafts projects with family members three or more times during the previous week than children enrolled in primary school. About one-fourth of first graders (25 percent) worked on arts and crafts projects with family members three or more times during the prior week compared with 18 percent of second graders and 17 percent of children enrolled in third grade.

Playing games or sports was a more common activity. A higher percent of preprimary children played games or sports with family members three or more times a week than did children in primary grades.

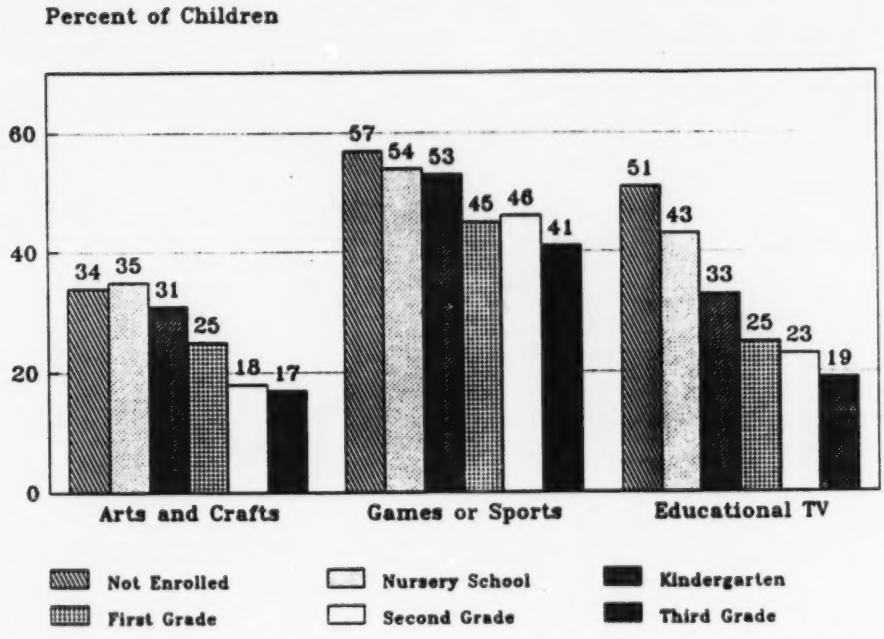
A majority of 3- to 8-year-olds (60 percent) watched educational television programs with a family member during the previous week. The frequency of watching educational television programs with a family member decreased as school enrollment progressed. Children not enrolled in school (51 percent) and children enrolled in nursery or kindergarten (43 percent and 33 percent, respectively) were more likely to watch educational television programs three or more times a week with family members than primary school children. The percent of primary school children who watched educational television three or more times a week with a family member ranged from 19 percent for third graders to 25 percent for first graders.

Survey Methodology and Data Reliability

The 1991 National Household Education Survey (NHES) is a telephone survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Data collection took place between February and April of 1991. The sample is nationally representative of all civilian, noninstitutionalized persons in the 50 States and the District of Columbia. This sample was selected, and the data collected using random-digit-dialing (RDD) methods and a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology.

Two different survey instruments were used to collect data on 3- to 8-year-olds. The first instrument, a household Screener administered to an adult member of the household, was used to determine whether any children of the appropriate ages lived in the household and to collect some other general household information. For households with children in the eligible group, an Early Childhood Education (ECE) interview was conducted with the person most knowledgeable about the care and education of the 3- to 8-year-old in the household. If more than one eligible child lived in the household, an ECE interview was conducted for each.

Figure 1.--Percent of 3- to 8-year-old children who have engaged in various activities with family members 3 or more times during the past week, by child's school enrollment: 1991



Note: Standard errors corresponding to the specific activities are as follows: Arts and Crafts: 0.9, 1.3, 1.1, 0.9, 0.9, 1.2; Games or Sports: 1.0, 1.2, 1.2, 1.1, 1.2, 1.7; Educational TV: 1.2, 1.0, 1.1, 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, respectively.

Source: U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey (NHES), spring 1991.

Response Rates

The NHES survey completed Screeners with 60,314 households, of which 10,317 contained at least one child between 3- to 8-years old eligible for the survey. The response rate for the Screener was 81 percent. The completion rate for the ECE interview, or the percent of interviews conducted, was over 94 percent. Thus, the overall response rate for the ECE interview was 76.3 percent (the product of the Screener response rate and the ECE completion rate). For the NHES, item nonresponse (the failure to complete some items in an otherwise completed interview) was very low. The item nonresponse rate for the variables in this report are less than 1 percent. When preparing estimates for this report, item nonresponse was treated as missing data. This is equivalent to assuming equal distributions for both respondents and nonrespondents.

Data Reliability

Estimates produced using data from the NHES are subject to two types of error, sampling and nonsampling. Sampling errors occur because the data are collected from a sample rather than a census of the population. Nonsampling errors are errors made in the collection and processing of data. Both are discussed below.

Nonsampling Errors

Nonsampling error is the term used to describe variations in the estimates which may be caused by coverage, data collection, processing, and reporting procedures. The sources of nonsampling errors are typically problems like unit and item nonresponse, the differences in respondents' interpretation of the meaning of the questions, response differences related to the particular time the survey was conducted, and mistakes in data preparation.

In general, it is difficult to identify and estimate either the amount of nonsampling error or the bias caused by this error. However, in the NHES survey, efforts were made to prevent it from occurring, and to compensate for it where possible. For instance, during the survey design phase, which entailed over 500 hours of CATI instrument testing and a pretest with over 200 households, efforts were made to check for consistency of interpretation of items, and to eliminate ambiguity in items.

An important nonsampling error for a telephone survey is the failure to include persons who do not live in households with telephones. About 90 percent of all 3- to 8-year-olds live in households with telephones. Estimation procedures were used to help reduce the bias in the estimates associated with children who did not live in telephone households.

Sampling Errors

The sample of telephone households selected for the NHES is just one of many possible samples that could have been selected. Therefore, estimates produced from the NHES sample may differ from estimates that would have been produced from other samples. This type of variability is called sampling error because it arises from using a sample of households with telephones, rather than all households with telephones.

The standard error is a measure of the variability due to sampling when estimating a statistic.[6] It indicates how much variance there is in the population of possible estimates of a parameter for a given sample size. Standard errors can be used as a measure of the precision expected from a particular sample. The probability that a complete census would differ from the sample by less than one standard error are about 68 out of 100. The chances that the difference would be less than 1.65 times the standard error are about

90 out of 100; that the difference would be less than 1.96 the standard error, about 95 out of 100.

Standard errors for all of the estimates are presented in the tables. These standard errors can be used to produce confidence intervals. For example, an estimated 35 percent of children were read to daily. This figure has an estimated standard error of 0.5 percent. Therefore, the estimated 95 percent confidence interval for this statistic is approximately 34-36 percent.

All differences cited in the text of this report are significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

ENDNOTES

[1]This report contains preliminary estimates from the survey.

[2]For preprimary children (those not yet in first grade) the parent was asked how often he/she or the child's other parent/guardian (if any) read to the child. For primary school students, the parent was asked how often he/she and other family members read to the child.

[3]Because this study includes 3- to 8-year-olds only, not all third graders are represented. In addition, a small number of children enrolled in higher grades are included.

[4]About 1.7 percent of parents reported not owning a television or zero hours of television viewing.

[5]Parents of preprimary children were asked about a wider range of activities. Findings pertaining to these activities will be included in a forthcoming NCES publication.

[6]Standard errors for statistics presented in this report were estimated using a jackknife replication method.